

Cost Sharing for Planning Process

The Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (PL 99-662) is viewed by many as landmark legislation in that it established clear non-Federal cost sharing for many of the projects and activities of the Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works program. A key element was the establishment in law of a two phase planning process whereby the first phase (reconnaissance) would be 100% Federally funded and non-Federal interests would pay a significant portion (50%) of the cost for the second phase (feasibility). The Corps had already established administrative procedures to initiate such cost sharing in a January 1986 report entitled "A Plan for Planning in 1986". The report reassessed Corps planning "so that study cost sharing can be implemented in a manner that will improve the non-Federal sponsor decision making equity, the certainty of planning outcomes, our (Corps) responsiveness to local needs, and planning efficiency." These outcomes have generally been achieved, particularly for specific projects that address problems or issues directly affecting the non-Federal sponsors. However, one unintended consequence of this success has been to increasingly narrow the focus of problem assessment and solution development to that of interest to a single sponsor.

In recent years, it has become clearer that water resources issues, problems and management of potential solutions must be addressed from a broader perspective to meet multiple Federal, regional, state, and local needs and objectives. This was affirmed in a recent series of public listening sessions the Corps held around the country. Many attendees expressed the need to manage watersheds and river basins in a balanced holistic approach. They noted that this requires coordinated watershed planning that involves all stakeholders and agencies (Federal, state and local). Many interests feel that a key responsibility of the Federal agencies involved in assessing basin and watershed issues and needs is to assure that all are assessed fairly and equitably in a comprehensive manner.

River basins and watersheds almost always cross multiple jurisdictions within states and regions and often extend over multiple states. Various jurisdictions within a watershed have specific concerns and issues they want to address. There are also broader issues and needs of stakeholders and interest groups outside the area as well as Federal objectives, which include protection of human health, water quality, fish and wildlife and ecosystem protection and restoration. In some instances, where a river basin or watershed is wholly within a State, the State has stepped forward to be the overall sponsor for such a study, often with a local or regional entity being required to cost share the feasibility level study of specific projects or activities that address the needs of that entity. In some instances, Congress has stepped forward to direct that a particular comprehensive basin assessment shall be a 100 % Federal responsibility.

The Corps recognizes that all future assessments of river basins and watersheds need to be undertaken in a holistic manner to develop a comprehensive plan that, to the extent practicable, addresses the problems, needs and objectives of all interests in a collaborative manner. This holistic approach should be applied to individual projects to assure their integration into an overall plan to address needs and solutions within the watershed or river basin. For multi-State/ multi-jurisdictional watersheds or river basins, it is recognized that it is often infeasible for a single non-Federal entity to cost share the overall evaluation of an entire watershed or basin. While there is no question about continuing non-Federal cost sharing for implementation of projects, it appears appropriate to reevaluate the method of cost sharing of assessments and development of comprehensive plans to address entire watersheds or river basins. The reevaluation should also address the best way to integrate feasibility studies of specific projects with comprehensive plans.